

A REVIEW OF THERAPEUTIC RECREATION FOR
EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN: LET ME IN, I WANT TO PLAY

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In the last 20 years, education of physical education teachers has flourished as a stand-alone academic discipline, with one of its primary scholarly areas including the benefits of such activity for exceptional children (e.g., Sherrill, 1993). Structured physical activity serves many purposes, including enhancing the affective domain throughout childhood development; providing a medium to teach important cognitive, social, and motor skills; and affording a wide variety of motivational opportunities related to lifetime success.

This book provides a detailed and inclusive account of recommended behavioral methods that focus on the “recreative needs of the exceptional child” (p. ix). The title, however, is somewhat misleading, because this book provides a much broader perspective than a simple resource for professionals interested in an applied account of recommended methods and materials for working in recreational environments with exceptional children. A strength of this text lies in its complementary provision of important theoretical, legal, and cultural foundations in favor of including recreational play within the educational experience.

The book is divided into 11 chapters, each including a summary focused on application of the principles contained in the

chapter and a list of references for those interested in pursuing the chapter information in greater detail. Each summary provides important directions for future behavior analyses in the form of hypothesized opportunities for using recreational interventions to facilitate the acquisition of important behaviors, some of which are being reported in the very recent behavioral literature. Also appealing is the use of detailed case examples and illustrative applications throughout the text to further illuminate the points within each chapter. Of potential concern to practicing behavior analysts, however, is the use of cognitive constructions such as *joy*, *enjoyment*, and *personal satisfaction* throughout the introductory portion of the text. This one caution aside, chapters 1 and 2 provide a cohesive introduction and definition of terms regarding the meaning of exceptionality in relation to the importance of recreation and its many potential benefits. Chapter 2 includes a concise overview of Piagetian, learning, psychoanalytic, and arousal theories of play, and a discussion of ecological context.

Chapter 3 provides a historical overview of the evolution of therapeutic recreation and includes a guide for finding existing programs that should be of help to beginning recreation supervisors. Chapter 4 discusses attempts to operationalize and measure the therapeutic effect of recreation using a “quality of children’s lives” construct (p. 84). It is at this juncture in the chapter that the material, unfortunately, leaves behavior-analytic theory behind.

Chapter 5 presents a concise, helpful, and

Fine, A. H., & Fine, N. M. (1996). *Therapeutic recreation for exceptional children: Let me in, I want to play* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

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very readable treatment of legislation related to exceptional children. Chapters 6 and 7 provide a detailed behavioral description of recommended recreational programming and recommended assessment procedures for those programs. Included in the text are detailed examples of accepted behavioral principles on how to teach a wide range of recreational skills and clearly diagrammed examples of each technique. Particularly appealing are the rationale and implementation discussion of recommended behavioral assessment methods for recreation programs and practical suggestions for conducting assessment at various developmental stages. This section also includes observation systems, rating scales, behavioral checklists, methods for conducting reliability, and references to motor and psychomotor tests. These chapters provide an excellent synthesis of behavioral assessment methods in relation to education in recreation settings.

The final chapters provide a thought-provoking set of recommendations that are designed to broaden the impact of recreation services and to expand recreation curricula into nontraditional areas. Emphasis is on common barriers to recreational involvement and the ways in which recreational therapy can facilitate a wide variety of life skills.

Overall, this book provides a comprehensive and very readable synthesis of relevant theory and behavioral application of struc-

tured recreation for the exceptional child. As such, it should be of interest to a wide range of psychologists, teachers, and clinicians. Two cautions to practicing behavior analysts using this text are (a) the introductory emphasis placed on the cognitive goals of having fun and the private event of "sheer enjoyment" (p. 24) and (b) the lack of references linking recently reported behavioral studies (i.e., those reported in the last 3 to 4 years) to many of the posited connections made in the summary sections. If supplemented with recent data-based behavioral literature (e.g., recent issues of *JABA* and *Education and Treatment of Children*) that focuses on the study of play activities and the exceptional child, the book provides an excellent advanced undergraduate or introductory graduate text and, as a stand-alone text, provides an excellent resource for professionals who work in public or private education settings in which exceptional children are served.

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